

# *City of Alexandria, Virginia*

## **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** SEPTEMBER 7, 2011

**TO:** KEVIN POSEY, CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION; AND  
JOHN KOMOROSKE, CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION

**FROM:** RICHARD BAIER, P.E., LEED AP., DIRECTOR, T&ES

**SUBJECT:** AGENDA ITEM #5 - PUBLIC HEARING AND CONSIDERATION OF THE FIRST STAGE OF IMPLEMENTATION FOR THE HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT CORRIDOR C (VAN DORN/BEAUREGUARD)

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of the High Capacity Transit Corridor C (Van Dorn / Beauregard) and the High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group (CWG) recommendation for the corridor (Attachment A).

**RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends the following:

1. That the Planning Commission and Transportation Commission receive a staff update on the CWG recommendation for Transitway Corridor C (Van Dorn/Beauregard);
2. That the Planning Commission and Transportation Commission receive public comments, and provide input to the City Manager and City Council in consideration of the CWG recommendation that Alternative D be selected for Corridor C (Van Dorn / Beauregard).

**DISCUSSION:** The City's 2008 Transportation Master Plan, and the City Council's 2010 Strategic Plan identify high capacity transitways within the City as high priority projects. The Transportation Master Plan identifies a network of High Capacity Transitways in three of Alexandria's most important travel corridors. These transitways will allow frequent and reliable transit service to existing and future development areas and to local and regional transit hubs. These transitways (which represent the corridors served and not necessarily the actual transitway alignment) are shown in Attachment B and include:

- Corridor A: Route 1 / Washington Street
- Corridor B: Duke Street / Eisenhower Avenue
- Corridor C: Van Dorn / Beauregard

The transitways are part of a larger regional system of high capacity transit between major

activity centers, transit facilities, high density mixed use areas and employment centers. All three of the transitways being planned for in Alexandria provide connectivity to major activity areas within Alexandria, and connectivity to regional destinations such as the Pentagon, Shirlington, and Fairfax County.

The City is currently analyzing the feasibility and implementation of the three transitways as part of the Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study. The first phase of the analysis has focused on Corridor C, due to the completion and opening of the BRAC-133 facility, and the related Beauregard Corridor land use planning effort that is currently underway. The transit options and recommendations for Corridor C have provided the basis for the land use discussions as part of the Beauregard Corridor Small Area Plan. The Transitway Corridor Feasibility Study (Study) is anticipated to be complete by early 2012. Due to the size and complexity of the planning effort, there is much coordination required for this project. City staff is coordinating with Arlington and Fairfax Counties. It is critical that these efforts stay on schedule to ensure optimal coordination between planning efforts and to ensure that adequate transportation infrastructure is in place to support all phases of development.

The Study includes the following:

- Development of concepts to provide enhanced transit services
- Evaluation of different transit mode technologies (bus, enhanced bus, bus rapid transit, and streetcar)
- Evaluation of alternatives for transit operations considering median and side running configurations
- Evaluation of the trade-offs between mixed traffic and dedicated lane facilities
- Identification of overall corridor implementation action plans to inform and guide future study and engineering efforts for each corridor
- Coordination with environmental permitting agencies to discuss the likely scope of future environmental documentation to be required based on the type of funding to be sought
- Coordination with adjacent localities and regional agencies
- Review of financial feasibility of alternatives

Analysis for Corridor C has included a review of existing conditions, an assessment of corridor needs, development of alternatives and screening criteria, and analysis of the alternatives using screening criteria. A significant amount of coordination has occurred with the Beauregard Corridor planning process, including ensuring that the corridor can accommodate the various transitway options.

Seven initial alternatives were developed and reviewed with the CWG. The initial screening analysis resulted in four remaining alternatives for more detailed screening. These four alternatives are described in Attachment C (Draft Selection of Preferred Alternative for Transitway Corridor C, dated May 12, 2011). The four alternatives included:

- **Alternative B:** Rapid Bus in mixed flow connecting to the Pentagon and Shirlington (Baseline Alternative)
- **Alternative D:** Bus Rapid Transit connecting to the Pentagon and Shirlington
- **Alternative E:** Bus Rapid Transit connecting to the Pentagon and Streetcar in mixed traffic connecting to Beauregard Town Center
- **Alternative G:** Streetcar in Dedicated Lanes connecting to Columbia Pike

Screening criteria included four broad categories including 1) effectiveness; 2) impacts; 3) cost effectiveness; and 4) financial feasibility. The screening criteria are further described in Attachment C. After the completion of the detailed screening, staff worked with the consultant to develop a recommendation for Corridor C, based on the screening evaluation, and input from the CWG, staff and the public. A summary of public comments is included in Attachment D.

The technical memorandum, dated May 12, 2011 was prepared by the consultant and recommended a preliminary preferred alternative and phasing strategy for CWG consideration. The CWG recommendation was that Alternative D (Bus Rapid Transit connecting to the Pentagon / Pentagon City and Shirlington) be the preferred alternative for implementation of transit in dedicated lanes in Corridor C. The CWG also recommended that Alternative D should be constructed in a manner that does not preclude future implementation of streetcar in the corridor.

### **High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group**

Given the City-wide importance of implementing the Transportation Master Plan and to ensure an open and transparent process, a citizen group was created to provide input to such issues as route alignments, cross-sections, methods of operation, type of vehicles, land use considerations, ridership, and financial implications. The group, known as the High Capacity Transit Corridor Work Group (CWG) includes: two members of City Council, one representative from the Planning Commission, one representative of the Transportation Commission, one representative of the Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Commission, one representative of the Chamber of Commerce, two residents appointed by the Federation of Civic Associations, and one resident with transit planning expertise.

The CWG held a total of six public meetings related to Corridor C since the project began in the summer of 2010. An opportunity for public comment was provided at all meetings, and staff has received public comments through other efforts as well, including via the project webpage, e-mails and letters. All public comments related to Corridor C provided to date have been forwarded to the CWG and a summary of the public comments are attached as part of this memorandum (Attachment D) .

Based on the analysis described above, at their May 19, 2011 meeting, the CWG recommended that the City move forward with Alternative D in dedicated lanes and that the transit way be designed in a manner not to preclude future conversion to streetcar. It should be noted that dedicated lanes means implementing dedicated lanes where and when feasible. The following motion was made and approved by the CWG:

*"Alternative D is the preferred alternative for phased implementation of transit in dedicated lanes in Corridor C until such time as Alternative G becomes feasible and can be implemented. This course of action is consistent with the Council's recent decision to provide dedicated lane transit along the segment of Corridor A that is north of Braddock Road. Evaluation and analysis will continue of Alternative D in preparation for future implementation of Alternative G. Construction of transit in Corridor C shall be the first priority of Alexandria's transportation projects. Each subsequent corridor shall be evaluated separately regarding the need to acquire additional right-of-way for dedicated lanes as discussed in the Transportation Master Plan."*

## **Land Use Planning**

Beauregard Corridor: Transportation is one of the primary issues being discussed as part of the ongoing community planning process in the Beauregard Corridor. Thus far, there have been a series of City-sponsored community meetings, eight Beauregard Community Stakeholder Group (BCSG) meetings and eight meetings held by the developers in the corridor. Several of these meetings have included presentations and discussions related to transportation and transit within the corridor.

As part of the process regarding potential land use and/or zoning changes, the transitway has been discussed, including the possible dedication of right-of-way by developers. The developers discussing potential redevelopment have property frontage for a significant portion of the proposed transit corridor. Therefore, a recommendation of future Master Plans would be the dedication of right-of-way to accommodate the transitway. This approach is similar to the approach the City took in the recently approved plans for Potomac Yard, North Potomac Yard, and Landmark/Van Dorn.

Accommodating transit and land use planning is consistent with the City's Strategic Plan Goal #3 of providing "a multimodal transportation network that supports sustainable land use and provides internal mobility and regional connectivity for Alexandrians."

Beauregard Street is currently designed as a suburban arterial roadway which lacks adequate accommodation for multiple modes of transportation. Full implementation of the City's Complete Streets policy would require the widening of streets like Beauregard in order to adequately accommodate transit, pedestrians and bicyclists. The proposed transitway itself results in the widening of Beauregard and the loss of existing trees within the median and along one or both sides of the street. Regardless of whether the street is widened to accommodate transit within existing lanes or new dedicated lanes, the existing median and roadway character will be altered as the existing median and side trees will be lost to accommodate the Complete Streets goals. Both T&ES and P&Z staff believe that although there are some downsides, the widening of Beauregard Street is an opportunity, as a significant amount of new landscaping, street trees, bicycle facilities, along with wider sidewalks, transit stations and accompanying street furniture will create an attractive new multi-modal boulevard. This boulevard will accommodate all users, use green technology and complement the character of the neighborhood. Some of these enhanced improvements are desired to be included as potential development contributions in conjunction with the Beauregard Corridor Plan.

A challenge with providing dedicated transit lanes is that they require additional width to the street, unless existing travel lanes are removed to accommodate the transitway. The removal of an existing travel lane was analyzed and discussed as part of the feasibility analysis. However, a majority of the CWG and many community members felt that adding new dedicated lanes would be necessary in the Beauregard-Van Dorn corridor, due to the significant congestion that would result in the taking away of existing travel lanes.

Landmark / Van Dorn Plan: The Landmark / Van Dorn Plan includes a number of transit recommendations and depends on the provision of high-capacity transit service to support the full build-out of the proposed development. The plan was intended to be consistent with and support implementation of the transitway corridors approved in the Transportation Master Plan.

The Landmark/Van Dorn Plan accommodates dedicated transit lanes in Corridor C along Van Dorn Street from Landmark Mall to the Van Dorn Metro Station, and provides for dedicated lanes in the Duke Street Corridor (Corridor B) within the planning area.

### **Process**

Generally, significant planned capital road and transit improvements within the City are included in a Master Plan when approved by the Planning Commission and City Council. Examples include the Route 1 Bridge and the potential new Potomac Yard Metrorail station.

In this case, the general alignment of the Corridor C transitway was approved as part of the 2008 adopted Transportation Master Plan and is a Citywide transportation facility with Citywide transportation and land use implications. Given the importance of these transit facilities and their broad citywide benefit, staff is recommending a phased implementation strategy for each of the three transitway corridors already approved in the Transportation Master Plan, which would consist of the following:

1. CWG review and recommendation to City Council on route alignments, cross-sections, methods of operation, type of vehicles, land use considerations, ridership, and financial implications.
2. Review and input by the Planning Commission, Transportation Commission and approval by the City Council regarding the refined alignment and feasibility for each route.
3. After the specific alignments are approved by City Council, transitway elements including landscaping, streetscape and shelters will also require subsequent briefing to, and input from, the Planning Commission and Transportation Commission and then consideration and approval by City Council.

This three-step approach allows the Planning Commission, Transportation Commission and City Council the opportunity to review each alignment separately from its review of the detailed elements of the transitway. The approach also provides the community and stakeholders the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed transitway during each step of the process given the important Citywide nature of these projects.

### **Conclusion**

The proposed transitway along Corridor C will be one of the largest (approximately 24,000 linear feet or 4.5 miles one direction within the City limit) transit improvements within the City. The transitway was discussed extensively as part of the 2008 Transportation Master Plan. The Council's Strategic Plan includes an objective to increase transit options for locally oriented trips emphasizing inter-jurisdictional coordination, and specifically an initiative to begin formal planning and engineering for Corridor C. The recommendation by the CWG is a necessary implementation component of the Master Plan. The recommendation would provide a dedicated transitway for high capacity transit along a corridor that has high employment and residential densities, and major redevelopment, especially in the Beauregard and Landmark/Van Dorn areas.

Staff supports the proposed Corridor C transitway because it balances many of the goals of the City and the existing and planned development for this portion of the City. As with all implementation measures, the City often must balance competing objectives, including transit,

cost and neighborhood context.

### **Next Steps**

Staff is presenting the preliminary preferred recommendations for Corridor C to the Council at its September 13, 2011 regular session, and a public hearing is scheduled for September 17, 2011 where staff will ask Council to adopt the CWG recommendations and authorize staff to proceed to the next stages of implementation. Once a final Council decision is made, the Corridor C implementation plan will be finalized, and the project can proceed to the next phase which will include an Alternatives Analysis / Environmental Assessment. Following the Alternatives Analysis / Environmental Assessment, if finances are in place, the project will move into design, right-of-way acquisition and construction.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

Refined estimates for the transitway construction and operations will be developed during the subsequent phases of design for the transitway. It is anticipated that the Alternatives Analysis required for Corridor C would require \$1 million in funding. Either federal grand funds or City CIP funds will pay for the Alternatives Analysis. The FY 2012-2021 approved City CIP currently includes \$19.5 million in City funds for the construction of Corridor C. The City anticipates that the current redevelopment effort in the Beauregard Corridor will result in dedicated right of way, and significant developer contributions toward a large portion of the capital costs of the project.

The planning level cost estimates range from \$48 million if the alternative selected is Bus Rapid Transit to \$185 million if the alternative selected is streetcar in dedicated lanes. These estimates do not include right of way costs, maintenance facility, rolling stock or ongoing operating costs. At the lower end of the cost estimates the funding sources would likely primarily be City CIP and developer monies. The high end cost estimates would require substantial federal assistance in addition to City and developer monies. Given the state of federal transportation funding and the fact that the federal funds for this purpose are competitively awarded, there is a high degree of uncertainty regarding substantial future federal transportation funding.

**Attachment A** – CWG Corridor C Recommendation

**Attachment B** – City Transitway Initiatives

**Attachment C** - Draft Selection of Preferred Alternative for Transitway Corridor C (Technical Memorandum dated May 12, 2011)

**Attachment D** - Summary of Public Comments

### **STAFF:**

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